FARMING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Fall 2006, Vol. 7, No. 1

GROWING

B.C.'s Strengthening Farming Program highlighted on international stage

B.C.'s Strengthening Farming Program moved to the international stage as staff members from the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands were invited to present to the 2006 World Planners Congress and the third United Nations World Urban Forum, both held in Vancouver in June.

A team of Canadian and Australian agricultural land use practitioners, led by B.C. MAL, presented three sessions around the theme of "Planning for Food" at the 2006 World Planners Congress. The sessions focused on the importance of agricultural and food system planning for community sustainability. They described how, in Canada, provincial legislation, municipal and regional government bylaws, and planning and farm management criteria are used to contain urban growth, protect normal farm practices, and help resolve complaints at the interface.

A similar presentation was also made to a networking event at the United Nations World Urban Forum. This time, the Canadian team from BC and Quebec was joined by officials from Senegal and Sri Lanka. Participants heard about farm land preservation measures and how 'urban agriculture' can help help feed the world's urban poor.

Urban growth pressure on farming, the urban-rural interface, and urban agriculture were subjects of the World Planners Congress, post-Congress seminar, and the UN's third World Urban Forum.

As a result of the strong interest shown by planners, the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands partnered with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to organize a one-day seminar in Vancouver immediately following the Congress. Planning for Food brought together agricultural land use specialists and food systems planners and non-government groups from across Canada, Australia, and Sri Lanka to share their thoughts on farmland preservation and planning for agriculture.

Given the reality of our increasingly urbanized communities, the seminar provided participants with the opportunity to discuss the issues of preserving farmland and ensuring agriculture is an important and effective component on planning agendas.

"These presentations brought together people from around the globe who are involved in the kind of planning for agriculture that B.C has done," says B.C. MAL Land Use Planner Jim LeMaistre. "It helped create more interest amongst planners, who are normally more urban-focused, to ensure agriculture is on their radar."

Seminar participants decided to keep in touch through a listserve and further conferences, and to share information with other planners through journal articles.

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WUF3 FUM3

World Planners Congress

Municipalities help forge a 'win-win-win' on seasonal farm worker housing

Like many B.C. businesses and organizations, finding sufficient workers has been a significant challenge facing farmers across the province in recent years. In response, many BC producers have benefited from the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program that now allows farmers to employ migrant, seasonal farm workers to meet critical farm production and harvest dates.

For B.C.'s large horticultural producers, the search for workers has now given way to a need for more housing to accommodate the number of migrant seasonal workers they employ each year. But with the help of two local governments, the District of Pitt Meadows and the City of Richmond, producers and farm workers have benefited from new bylaws that allow for the construction of safe and proper housing for farm workers.

In Pitt Meadows, the local Agriculture Advisory Committee played a leading role in developing a new bylaw that would allow farmers to construct temporary accommodation for seasonal workers, while not alienating the long-term use of the agricultural land. The result was a "win-win-win" solution for producers, farm workers and local government planners.

Robin Robinson of Robinson Bros. Farms and Chair of the Pitt Meadows Agriculture Advisory Committee calls the new bylaw a "welcome solution" for area farms, a few of which require over one hundred seasonal workers. "In Pitt Meadows, we had really good support from our municipality that helped us resolve this issue in a positive way for everyone."

Under the bylaw, producers must provide assurances that the accommodation is only used to house migrant farm workers, that the accommodation be properly constructed, insulated, heated, has sprinkler protection, and that the accommodation be removed at a later date, should it no longer be required.

"The research and business case was solid, the ministry and industry provided good information and the local berry producers were very helpful," says Jake Rudolph, Chief Administrative Officer, District of Pitt Meadows. "And while we are just in year one of this new policy, so far so good."

The District of Pitt Meadows and the City of Richmond have adopted new bylaws that allow for construction of temporary accommodation on farmland.

The result has been the construction of several new on-farm housing projects that benefit seasonal workers and the farms that employ them.

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The agriculture industry is incredibly important to B.C.'s economy. But the very nature of agriculture is changing and we must change with it. Farmers are facing challenges such as hail and drought, and need flexibility to respond to changes in markets and a strong Canadian dollar. We need to collectively address these challenges to secure the sector's long-term profitability.

This year I set out themes as the foundation for a sustainable agriculture industry. Embracing the flow of knowledge is key to those considering farming as a way of life, and our government supports future farmers through 4-H. Local governments can help by ensuring land is retained for young farmers.

We are helping to bridge the urban/rural divide through funding for the provincial fair program and through a new agri-tourism road sign program, which raise public awareness of local agriculture and help link farmers and their neighbours.

Local governments are important partners in B.C.'s agriculture sector. Through planning for agriculture in our communities, we will strengthen the industry so it will be sustainable for future generations.

Pat Bell
Minister of Agriculture and Lands

B.C. Agricultural Advisory Committees now total 27

With the recent addition of the new Courtenay AAC, there are now 27 Agricultural Advisory Committees serving 29 local governments across B.C. Eleven AACs serve regional governments and 16 serve municipalities, cities, or a Gulf Island Trust Committee.

- Abbotsford
- Chilliwack
- Fraser Valley Regional District
- Greater Vancouver Regional District
- Kent
- Langley, Township of
- Pitt Meadows
- Richmond
- Squamish Lillooet Regional District – Pemberton Valley
- Surrey
- Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District
- Comox-Strathcona, Regional District of – Comox Valley AAC
- Comox-Strathcona, Regional District of – Area 'H' AAC
- Courtenay
- Islands Trust – Salt Spring Island
- North Cowichan
- Peninsula Agricultural Commission
  - District of Saanich
  - District of Central Saanich
  - District of North Saanich
  - Town of Sidney
- Central Kootenay, Regional District of – Creston Valley AAC
- Central Okanagan, Regional District of
- East Kootenay, Regional District of – Electoral Areas 'A', 'B' and 'C' AAC
- Kelowna
- Lake Country
- Okanagan-Similkameen, Regional District of – Area 'C' Rural Oliver AAC
- Peace River Regional District
- Penticton
- Spallumcheen
- Summerland

Agriculture around British Columbia

Agroforestry beginning to pay dividends

Agroforestry, as the name implies, is the combination of two of B.C.'s oldest industries. And for some B.C. farmers, it's beginning to pay dividends.

"Agroforestry is really about the intentional integration of agriculture and forestry practices," explains Dave Trotter, B.C. MAL Agroforestry Specialist. "For a producer, it's not about one piece of land being in a plantation of trees and an adjacent piece solely in traditional agriculture production; it's about integrating trees, shrubs and potentially non-timber forest products into normal agricultural practices or integrating agriculture practices into forested land."

The combination of trees/shrubs with agricultural crops can make better use of available soil resources and light resulting in greater total production per area than conventional agriculture and forestry. There are numerous examples from alley cropping, where a variety of crops are planted between rows of evergreen or fruit trees to silvopasture systems that integrate the number and arrangement of standing trees with forage production for grazing livestock. Management may range from highly intensive to more extensive approaches.

Local governments may need to adjust the uses permitted in their OCPs and zoning bylaws to encourage agroforestry.

In 2003, an Agroforestry Strategic Plan was adopted by the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC, which has also committed $500,000 toward agroforestry projects over the next five years. The fund can be accessed by producers on a matching basis and is administered by the Federation of BC Woodlot Associations.

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Agricultural Advisory Committee Workshop set for 2007

Coming Soon!

B.C.MAL will host another Agricultural Advisory Committee workshop in 2007. It is tentatively planned for February 14, the day before the Pacific Agriculture Show.

The event will build on the success of past provincial workshops that have brought together participants from all AACs to share ideas and common issues. Please stay tuned for the location.

Did you know?

In 2001, over half of all dairy farms and nearly 70% of dairy cows were located in the Fraser Valley Regional District.

Farm Focus Week in Kent: don't miss it!

Farm Focus Week in Kent – along with the Taste of Agassiz – has grown to become an enormously successful event that helps showcase area farms, farmers and the smorgasbord of food they produce.

Local producer and AAC Chair Ken Schwaerzle, reports that Kent's Farm Focus Week has grown from a Buds 'n' Blooms plant and shrub sale to include a popular Circle Farm Tour; a schools program sponsored by the B.C. Dairy Foundation that provides milk to local children; and agriculture seminars for local farmers.

The highlight of the week has become the Taste of Agassiz which is held over the May long weekend. It now attracts over 350 people – farmers, consumers, chefs, media and community leaders – who gather to taste the very best locally produced food prepared by some of the Lower Mainland's top chefs.

Coastal Land Use Specialist now in place

The B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands is expanding its Strengthening Farming Program to work with coastal local governments and their aquaculture industries. Clint Collins has been hired for this position. Clint has been a fisheries inspector and shellfish and marine plant biologist working in the aquaculture sector for the Ministry's Courtenay office for the last three years. Clint's first priority will be to build relationships with coastal local governments involved with the aquaculture industry.

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Did you know?

Agri-teams are available to all agricultural communities

As a resource to local governments and producers, B.C. MAL and ALC have assigned a staff "agri-team" to each B.C. community with agricultural land.

The list by community can be found at: www.al.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/sf/Contacts.htm.

Environmental Farm Planning a useful tool

BC Producers are taking advantage of the Canada – British Columbia Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) Program. Although the EFP Program is voluntary and the contents of the plans are confidential, local governments should be aware of the benefits of the program to the management of farms in their area.

The EFP Program, administered by the BC Agriculture Council, helps producers identify environmental risks posed by their farming and ranching practices, develop plans for dealing with these risks, and make changes to their operations to reduce risks over the long term. Incentive funding is available to cover between 30 and 50% of the eligible costs of implementing beneficial management practices (BMP) identified in their plans.

In place of added regulation, local governments should encourage producers to participate in the EFP Program. Producer participants will gain a better understanding of risks their operations may pose and means by which these risks can be reduced. In many areas across the province producers have assessed their operations and put many BMPs into place. These BMPs are providing improvement to water use efficiency, manure storage, and nutrient and riparian management.

More information on the Environmental Farm Plan Program is available at www.bcac.bc.ca

This Peace River grain farm – Critcher Farms – has a fully implemented Environmental Farm Plan and its owners are active participants in the program.

Local governments take steps to support agriculture

Agricultural Area Plan for Salt Spring Island

The Island Natural Growers and the Islands Farmers Institute have partnered with the Salt Spring Island Trust to complete an Area Farm Plan on Salt Spring Island. With funding assistance from the Investment Agriculture Foundation, the plan will be conducted over the winter of 2006-07.

The Salt Spring Island Trustees are conducting an Official Community Plan (OCP) review and the development of the Area Farm Plan will help shape the OCP on agriculture-related issues. The Ministry of Agriculture and Lands completed an Agricultural Land Use Inventory this fall as part of the baseline information for the Area Farm Plan.

Land Use Inventory underway in Columbia Valley

Local B.C. MAL staff has begun work on an agricultural land use inventory and background report for the Columbia Valley in the East Kootenay Regional District. Given the local climate, the most common form of agriculture in the area is cow-calf operations, which typically require larger parcels of land than other types of farming.

Recent development pressure on local land has resulted in significant land value inflation, and led B.C. MAL to begin assembling background information that can be used by the Regional District to develop an Agriculture Plan for the area. Over the summer, farm activity data was collected and used to generate detailed, digitized maps of the area. Producers were interviewed to discover what some of the challenges – and opportunities – are for agriculture in the area and what steps may be taken to better support the industry. The ministry also hosted a workshop with both producers and staff from the Regional District to discuss local agricultural issues and identify barriers to the industry's success.

Producers in the Columbia Valley were recently interviewed by B.C. MAL staff as part of an agricultural land use inventory and background report on the local industry.

To date, area farmers, ranchers and all agencies of government have received the research positively. The draft report and mapping will be completed over the next six months for presentation to the East Kootenay Regional District, and, with their approval, form the basis of a vibrant plan to support local agriculture.

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A list of local agricultural initiatives underway across British Columbia

Local governments across B.C., in partnership with the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, are taking steps to support agriculture. Several agricultural land use inventories (LUI) have been finished this past year, or are underway. They are usually part of the preparation for other plans, such as Official Community Plans (OCP) or Agricultural Area Plans (AAP) or water use strategies. Each LUI will have a report containing data tables and maps showing the distribution of land uses within a community.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT	LUI	AAP	OTHER PLANS
Spallumcheen	Completed	Completed	
Summerland	Data collected 2006	In process	
Cariboo RD (Williams Lake – 150 Mile House fringe areas)	Data collected 2005; report in process		OCPs in process
Cariboo RD (Quesnel fringe area)	More data to be collected in 2007		OCP pending in 2007– 08
East Kootenay RD	Data collected 2006	Background report being prepared	OCPs in process
Salt Spring Island (part of the Islands Trust)	Data collected 2006	In process	OCP review in process
Capital RD (Metchosin, Saanich, Central Saanich, North Saanich)	Data collected 2005; reports being prepared		OCP reviews in process
Fraser - Fort George RD	Partial data collected; to be continued in 2007		
Okanagan Basin Water Project (all areas of the basin)	Most data collected, to be finished in 2007	Rural Oliver ag plan in process	Large study of future water needs
Thompson-Nicola RD (Noble Creek area)	Data collected 2006		Study of future water needs

Smart Growth on the Ground in Oliver

Last May, an innovative approach to land use planning in Oliver culminated in a charrette – a French term used to describe a time limited design event in which a diverse group of people strive to produce a mutually agreeable answer to a complex design problem.

The charrette played an important part in the Oliver Smart Growth on the Ground (SGOG) project initiated by the Oliver Economic Development Society. The society applied to Smart Growth on the Ground, a partnership between Smart Growth BC and the Real Estate Institute of BC and the Design Centre for Sustainability at UBC.

"We work with individual communities across the province with the goal to assist them to design a more sustainable community plan and work through policy and bylaw changes required to help implement that plan," Jodie Siu, a land use planner with SGOG, "In the case of Oliver, we were really excited about working with an agricultural community which we had not done before."

> "They know agriculture is a huge economic engine for them. They were really interested in making sure that the land use decisions they made were supportive of agriculture."
>
> — Jodie Siu, Planner, Smart Growth on the Ground

And agriculture played a key role in the Oliver project with participation from local producers, B.C. MAL and over 250 residents. "The whole economic development strategy for Oliver is couched in agricultural terms," commented Siu. "They know agriculture is a huge economic engine for them. They were really interested in making sure that the land use decisions they made were supportive of agriculture."

From November 2005 to May 2006, the planning team, with the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen and the Town of Oliver, hosted nine evening events at which over 250 people participated. The public input was considered at the four-day long charrette where 23 citizens, elected officials, government staff, and other experts prepared a concept of a sustainable future for the greater Oliver area.

With the assistance of professional designers and facilitators, the team created a series of maps and visual images to portray their desired future.

Some highlights include:

- creating a "green spine" along the Okanagan River (including its old meandering course), to enhance and take full advantage of this natural amenity
- absorbing most of the anticipated growth within the existing footprint of the Town, by allowing people to add new units on their existing property, and making the best use of commercial and industrial sites
- concentrating on the downtown "wine village" area (including the current main street and the upcoming redevelopment site), with design principles to guide development
- strengthening "networks" for getting around the region, including secondary roads, agricultural-only roads, trails, and transit
- maintaining the beautiful rural views in the region (without hindering agricultural operations) using simple design and landscape improvements.

Currently, the images and ideas of the charrette team are being consolidated into a document called the Concept Plan which will soon be completed.

For more information on Smart Growth on the Ground, please go to: www.sgog.bc.ca

Did you know?

The Comox Valley Economic Development Society has developed a comprehensive investment and marketing strategy intended to attract food and beverage producers to the Comox Valley.
www.agrifoodcomoxvalley.com

Size of housing impacts farmland

Several local governments are interested in addressing the development of "mega houses" in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) and restricting the amount of farmland that they alienate. The concept of a farm home plate restricts houses and the ancillary residential features such as lawns, swimming pools, tennis courts, garages for personal vehicles to a specified maximum size. The home plate is also limited on a lot mainly by restricting how far the farm home plate can be located from a road frontage that provides access to the property.

The Corporation of Delta recently passed a new bylaw restricting the farm home plate to 5,600 square metres for one house and 5,000 square metres if there is an additional farmhouse.

Many urban communities have imposed house size restrictions at the request of residents to preserve the character of a neighbourhood. Often the house size restrictions are provided as a percentage of lot coverage. In the rural setting of the ALR, the character of the neighbourhood is generally not an issue and could be addressed through the farm home plate.

There may be a maximum house size beyond which the capital investment in the house reduces the attractiveness of the lot for farming. A very large expensive home on farmland may limit the number of farmers who are able to purchase and farm the property. Rental of the land around an expensive house may be limited as well.

The Corporation of Delta recently passed a new bylaw restricting the farm home plate to 3,600 sq. m. for one house and to 5,000 sq. m. if there is an additional farmhouse. The farm home plate must be within 60 m. of the road frontage and the house must be within 50 m. of the road – leaving a 10 m. area for the backyard. In addition, Delta restricted the maximum house size to 330 sq. m. (3,500 sq. ft.) for lots less that 8 ha. and to 465 sq. m. (5,000 sq. ft) for lots larger than 8 ha.

B.C. MAL is continuing to develop guidelines for local governments in relation to these types of housing location and size factors.

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Guidelines coming for fill on farmland

To assist local governments to deal with the serious issue of unauthorized fill dumping on farmland, the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands will soon be publishing a fact sheet on Guidelines for Farm Practices Involving Fill.

The fact sheet will serve as an easy reference for acceptable "fill" practices for all of B.C.'s major commodities. In short, the Agricultural Land Commission regulations allow fill necessary for farm use provided that the filling activity does not cause danger to adjacent land or negatively affect the flow of any waterway.

Many blueberry growers mulch their plants with sawdust to conserve moisture and control weeds.

Unfortunately, there have been recent cases when landowners, often those who are not actively farming, have accepted poor quality fill that largely destroys their property's potential for future agricultural use. Many producers have raised concerns over the impact unauthorized fill has on drainage for adjacent properties.

The fact sheet should help local governments balance the needs of a viable agriculture industry with local government's ability to take action against property owners in violation of local bylaws or Agricultural Land Commission requirements. Some local governments have begun to use the fact sheet to help draft bylaws and develop programs to deal with illegal dumping in their communities.

Last year, the City of Surrey launched a successful program aimed at reducing illegal dumping. In addition to an information campaign aimed at informing excavation and trucking firms where they could dump legally, Surrey produced 100 bylaw enforcement signs and placed them along roadsides, mostly in farming areas. Part of the solution has been to identify acceptable sites for the legal dumping of fill.

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A publication of the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Lands

www.agf.gov.bc.ca

Other Web Sites Worth Checking

www.alc.gov.bc.ca www.agr.gc.ca www.bcac.bc.ca www.smartgrowth.bc.ca